
Florida Republican Lawmakers Threaten Measures against Obama

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Appearing at a tense press conference held Thursday in Miami were Sen. Marco Rubio and lower house members Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and Mario Diaz-Balart, all three of them Cuban-Americans, along with relatives of four Brothers to the Rescue pilots who died when their small planes were shot down by a Cuban fighter jet off the island's coast in 1996.

Rubio and his House colleagues had very harsh words for the president and his agreement to resume diplomatic ties with Cuba after six decades of confrontation and "cold war" with the island nation.

Journalists from national and international media outlets jammed Ros-Lehtinen's small office and the three lawmakers used words like "betrayal," "sadness," "disappointment," "pain" and "insult" to describe their feelings about Obama's move.

"We're just in great anguish about this decision," said Ros-Lehtinen. "Because of the president's action ... the killers of the Brothers to the Rescue (pilots are) free while millions of Cubans still suffer under Castro's rule."

"Obama's deal appeases the Castro regime at the expense of the rights and freedoms of Cubans. Obama sacrificed the dreams of millions of people on the island while making no progress toward a democratic Cuba. The Cuban people are no more free today than they were before Obama's terrible deal," she said.

The president's announcement, delivered Wednesday in an address to the nation, was an "insult to the Cuban-American community that yearns for freedom in Cuba," she said.

"Yesterday, we saw Obama doing what he said he would never do," said Diaz-Balart, who added that this rapprochement with the Castro regime was an attempt to appease the "tyranny" of the Castro brothers, Fidel and Raul, who have ruled Cuba since 1959.

Diaz-Balart also railed against Obama's "cynicism" at saying – as he did in his speech on Wednesday – that the rapprochement with Havana was for "the good of the Cuban people," when in reality – he said – it is just a "life preserver for a regime that is weaker than ever."

Rubio, who is keeping his presidential options open, did not hide his deep disappointment with the president's "terrible agreement" with Cuba at a time, he said, when "repression on the island has increased."

The senator said that Congress reserved the right to consider "all options" to fight the agreement.

Also present at the press conference was former Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Mario's brother, who said that Obama had violated the 1996 Helms-Burton Law – which he helped draft – that strengthens the embargo on the island imposed by the United States as a means to exert pressure on Havana to implement democratic changes in Cuba.
